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A New Witness for God: Chapter VIII

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Abstract: This article argues against the Solomon Spaulding theory for the origin of the Book of Mormon and the idea that Sidney Rigdon wrote the Book of Mormon.

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A NEW WITNESS FOR GOD.

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CHAPTER VIII.

What Aaron and Hur were to Moses when they held up his hands that Israel might prevail over Amalek, presumptive and collateral evidences are to a proposition. As Aaron and Hur sustained the hands of Moses and Israel prevailed, so it often happens that presumptive and collateral evidences so support a proposition that Truth is made evident and triumphant.

It was my purpose to have concluded this subject as soon as I could place before the reader the strong, I may say rather, the positive and invulnerable testimony of the eleven special witnesses which I considered in the last chapter; but after proceeding so far, I am induced to go a step or two further and consider some of those minor evidences respecting the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, as well as the direct testimonies we have already examined. I must say, however, that what is set down in this and the subsequent chapters is by no means to be regarded as an exhaustive discussion of the several points of evidence introduced. On the contrary, I have merely indicated the existence of such evidence rather than discussed it, my space forbidding me doing anything more.

First then as to the origin of the Book of Mormon. The account already given of its origin, and the testimony in support of that account, is strengthened not a little by the fact that no other rational theory for its existence can be given. Every theory concocted to account for its existence other than that given by Joseph Smith and the special witnesses of its divine authenticity, breaks down when under examination. The theory was once advanced that by some means an old manuscript written by one Solomon Spaulding, fell into the hands of Sidney Rigdon, and that he made certain modifications in it, put Joseph Smith to the front as a prophet, and had him publish this old manuscript as the Book of Mormon.

This theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon was invented by one D. P. Hurlbut, an apostate who wrote a book against the Saints in 1836, entitled "Mormonism Unveiled," published by E. D. Howe of Painsville, Ohio. While collecting the material for that work, Hurlbut obtained of Mrs. Davidson, Solomon Spaulding's widow, who had married again, the manu-

script story written by her former husband, entitled "The Manuscript Found," promising to publish it as an *expose* of the Book of Mormon. But Hurlbut never published it, and assigned to Mrs. Davidson as a reason for its non-publication that it was found not to be what had been expected, and would not suit his purpose. Hurlbut never returned the manuscript, however, to Mrs. Davidson, and its fate remained a mystery until recently.

Meantime the flimsy fabrication of Hurlbut has been very generally accepted as the true account of the origin of the Book of Mormon, and is copied into numerous magazines, books and encyclopædias. And thus a book of such importance, the voice of an entire continent speaking from the dust of ages, bearing solemn and potent testimony for God and Christ, and proving the truthfulness and inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures, is lightly thrust aside as well by the learned as by the ignorant. Not because the learned have examined the theory set forth by Hurlbut and found it substantial, but because Satan inclined their hearts to accept the faintest shadow of an excuse for rejecting that which God had revealed; and that they have done without examining the evidences in favor of its divine authenticity, or stopping to consider whether or not the theory of Hurlbut as to its origin was worthy of credence. This evil-hearted generation reject this message from God blindly, and accept without examination and adopt without consideration the first idle fable that will furnish them with an excuse for rejecting this New Witness for God. But in the presence of God hereafter, vain will be their excuses, and great will be their condemnation for refusing to believe that which He has revealed and surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses to testify of its truthfulness.

The Spaulding story theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon, however, must now be laid aside forever. The Spaulding manuscript has been found, and is now in the library of Oberlin College, Ohio; it has been published, and on comparing it with the Book of Mormon no similarity whatever exists, neither in incident, names, matter, style, phraseology or anything else. The manner of its discovery is, briefly, as follows: The printing establishment of Mr. Howe, who was the publisher of Hurlbut's "Mormonism Unveiled," and also of the Painsville, Ohio, *Telegraph*, was sold to Mr. L. L. Price, an anti-slavery editor, and for years State printer of Columbus, Ohio. Subsequently Mr. Rice moved to Honolulu, Sandwich Islands. In 1884 Jas. H. Fairchild, President of Oberlin College, visited Mr. Rice at Honolulu, and suggested that the latter might have among his numerous papers valuable anti-slavery documents, which he would be willing to contribute to the rich collection already in the Oberlin College library. In looking through his papers, in company with President Fairchild, he discovered an old, worn and faded manuscript of about 175 pages, bearing the following indorsement upon it:

The writings of Solomon Spaulding, proved by Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, John N. Miller and others. The testimonies of the above gentlemen are now in my possession.

(Signed) D. P. HURLBUT.

Mr. Rice had no recollection of how or when that manuscript came into his possession, but unquestionably it must have fallen into his hands when the printing establishment of E. D. Howe, with all its books, etc., etc., passed into his possession. Mr. Rice and President Fairchild at once concluded it

was the long lost manuscript from which the Book of Mormon derived its origin, and at once set about comparing the two. The result of that investigation is thus given by President Fairchild in the *New York Observer* of Feb. 5, 1885:

There seems no reason to doubt that this is the long lost story. Mr. Rice, myself and others compared it with the Book of Mormon and could detect no resemblance between the two, in general or detail. There seems to be no name nor incident common to the two. The solemn style of the Book of Mormon, in imitation of the English Scriptures, does not appear in the manuscript. The only resemblance is in the fact that both profess to set forth the history of the lost tribes.* Some other explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon must be found, if any explanation is required.

The Rev. C. M. Hyde, of the North Pacific Missionary Institute, who has examined the manuscript and compared it with the Book of Mormon, contributed an article to the *Boston Congregationalist* on the subject, in which he gives a history of the attempts of Hurlbut to connect the manuscript with the Book of Mormon, and thus concludes:

The story has not the slightest resemblance in names, incidents or style to anything in the Book of Mormon. . . . There is no attempt whatever to imitate Bible language, and introduce quotations from the Bible, as in the Book of Mormon. . . . It is evident from an inspection of this manuscript, and from the above statements, that whoever wrote the Book of Mormon, *Solomon Spaulding did not write it.*

I deem it unnecessary to pursue this subject further. The old Spaulding theory so often exploded in the writings of the Elders of the Church, is now buried out of sight by the finding of the Spaulding manuscript. The *Deseret News* obtained a copy of it from President Fairchild, and published it just as it is, with all its imperfections of orthography, grammar, etc., and even with the alterations and erasures of Mr. Spaulding printed in italics, and they who are curious enough may examine it for themselves.

Equally absurd is the theory that Sidney Rigdon wrote the Book of Mormon. While Joseph Smith was engaged in translating it, Sidney Rigdon was associated with Mr. Alexander Campbell in founding the sects of Disciples, or Christians, or, as they are now called, the Campbellites. Nor did he know anything of either Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon until P. P. Pratt, who was formerly a member of the same sect as himself, found him in Kirtland, Ohio, and presented him with a copy of it, and instructed him in the new faith—new faith? nay, the old faith, restored again to the earth. This was in the summer of 1830.

After the death of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon was ambitious to lead the Church, but was rejected by the Saints and became disaffected towards them, and was excommunicated. If he was the author of the Book of Mormon, why did he not in the days of his bitterness towards the Church expose the imposition? Moreover, Sidney Rigdon was a man of high scholarly attainments and consummate eloquence—qualifications that would make him restive and unwilling to stand subordinate to an uncultured man like

* Even in this President Fairchild is mistaken, for the Book of Mormon does not profess to give the history of the lost tribes, but gives us to understand that the aborigines of America are the descendants, chiefly, of Joseph the Son of Jacob, and of Judah.

Joseph Smith in such a movement as the establishment of what the world calls "Mormonism," unless he saw in that youth the power of God manifested, and knew that he was appointed to his place by the voice of God.

Again, his very scholarship is against the theory that he wrote the Book of Mormon. No man anxious to shine in the literary world would adopt the style of the Book of Mormon. No man whose mind had been moulded by the influences, and especially the religious influences of the nineteenth century, *could* produce such a book. And while I maintain that no educated mind of modern days would or could produce such a book as this history of the Nephites, I believe that all will agree on examining it, that it must have been equally or even far more beyond the power of Joseph Smith, reared as he was in the backwoods of the State of New York, unacquainted with the world or its history, to produce such a volume. The book is so complex in its construction, and yet so completely consistent throughout with the theory of its construction, that I believe all who make themselves familiar with it will say that Joseph Smith could not have written it.

This last thought respecting the construction of the book brings me to a consideration of that subject more closely. The Book of Mormon for the most part, as I have already stated in a previous chapter*, is an abridgment from the larger plates of Nephi, and has a style that one would naturally expect to find in a work of that character—that is, the historical narrative condensed from the more voluminous records of Nephi, with occasional *verbatim* quotations from those larger records, and the whole mixed up with explanatory notes, observations, and even exhortations, prophecies, and warnings by Mormon—rather a complicated style, and one that Joseph Smith would have been totally incompetent to have adopted and consistently persevered in to the close of the volume. But as already observed, the first 157 pages of the Book of Mormon is not an abridged record. It is a verbatim translation of the smaller plates of Nephi, that took the place of the first part of Mormon's abridgment, in consequence of the changes which had been made in the MSS. that was stolen from Martin Harris, as already explained. Now this part of the book is distinct in its style of composition from the abridgment of Mormon. In those 157 pages not a trace of those explanatory notes, observations, etc., so often seen in Mormon's abridgment is found. The narratives, prophecies, descriptions, etc., as given by the respective original writers who engraved their words upon the smaller plates of Nephi run on unchecked by the hand of an abridger. And this distinction in the style of the two parts of the book is evidence of no small value in favor of the origin ascribed to the book by Joseph Smith. True the point of evidence is incidental, and some may esteem it slight; but those accustomed to literary criticism will place very high value upon it. To see it in its full force, suppose that the distinction of style did not exist, but the same complex style of Mormon's abridgment had been found, too, in that part which it is claimed is not an abridgment, but a verbatim translation of the original records of Nephi—how fatal that fact would have been considered to the claims of the Book of Mormon! In proportion, then,

* Chapter vii.

that the absence of that distinction of style would militate against the claims of the Book of Mormon, its existence should weigh in favor of the pretensions of the book.

Another fact that will doubtless attract the attention of the reader of the Book of Mormon, and that will tend to impress upon him a conviction of its truth, is that it locates the chief centres of civilization in those parts of the American Continent where the subsequent researches of the American antiquarians prove them to have existed. Let it be borne in mind that at the time the Book of Mormon was published, but very little of the large amount of information now in circulation relative to ancient American civilization, and where its chief centres were located were not then in existence; and that little which did exist never reached the hands of Joseph Smith in the Western wilds of the State of New York. Humboldt had not then published his "Travels in America," in which much of the information above alluded to is contained. Carthwood and Stephens had not then given to the world the result of their researches in Yucatan and other parts of the continent; Nor was Lord Kingsborough's elaborate work, "The Antiquities of Mexico," in existence. And the fact that the Book of Mormon locates the centres of Nephite civilization where scientific investigation now proves the civilization of the ancient Americans to have existed is presumptive evidence of no mean order in favor of its truthfulness.

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RELEASE AND APPOINTMENT.—President John H. Kelson is released from presiding over the Newcastle Conference to return home.

Elder Sylvester Bradford is appointed to succeed Elder Kelson as president of the Newcastle Conference.

A company of Saints from the British Isles, left Liverpool per Guion S.S. *Wyoming*, on Saturday, June 23rd, in charge of Elder H. E. Bowring. Including the returning missionaries, there were 118 souls in all. By letter from Queenstown, we learn that the weather was pleasant; all were feeling well, and rejoicing in the prospect of speedily reaching the peaceful valleys of Utah.

It is anticipated that a company from Scandinavia will leave here on July 28th, and another from the British Mission on August 11th.

FACTS AND EVENTS.

A general mourning for fourteen days for the late Emperor of Germany has been officially ordered, and is for the most part obeyed, bright colors having for the moment disappeared from the ladies' costumes. The change is very apparent in all places of public assembly and at the opera.

Non-attendance at church has engaged the attention of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The presbyteries and the parishes have reported on the extent of non-churchgoing and the causes. In 407 parishes there were 102,367 persons not connected with any church, and four-fifths of the returns assign intemperance as a main cause. Among other reasons why the churches have not their complement of